

David (PM)

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0:00] Hebrews 11, 32 to 40. Gee, I love it. Do you know what I love about it? I love right at the start. Right at the start of the passage, the writer of Hebrews, there's a mystery, we don't know who this person is.

Right at the start of Hebrews, they say, and what more shall I say? And what more shall I say? And then they just keep going. And then they just like keep powering through like a preacher. I'm going to close up. And then they just go for another 10 minutes. But what he actually does do though, if you read it really closely, the writer of Hebrews does actually speed up the narrative. Speeds it up. You might remember Hebrews 11, when we're in there, Hebrews 11, the whole chapter starts with the definition of faith. And it says, now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

And then after that, it's story after story after story that all begin with by faith. By faith, Abraham. By faith, Noah. By faith, Moses. And then kind of like a paragraph story of how God used these people of great faith.

[1:07] That's most of chapter 11. And then we get to verse 32. That's our passage. And the writer realizes they can't keep going at this pace. They can't keep like giving a whole paragraph just to each story.

So what they do is they just rattle off a whole list of names, which the earliest readers, the first readers would have recognized. So verse 32. What more shall I say?

I don't have enough time. But here's some names. Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah and David and Samuel and the prophets. So the first readers would hear these names and they would attach stories to those.

That would be really encouraging for them. They're great stories of great faith. And then the writer, instead of just saying names, just gives little snippets of events that are really great events.

Verse 33a. They conquered kingdoms. They enforced justice. They obtained promises. They stopped the mouths of lions. They quenched the power of fire. Escaped the edge of the sword. They were made strong out of weakness.

[2:08] It's brilliant stuff. It's brilliant stuff. Stories of people overcoming weakness. Stories of victory against the odds. Gideon is mentioned. Yeah.

Gideon. Great story there. He didn't think he thought he was a bit of a loser. And his army was reduced to just 300 people. conquered the huge army of the Midianites. David, handful of stones, conquered the giant Goliath.

Samson, tricked, captured, blinded, changed to these columns of this pagan temple. And all the pagan priests are just mocking this guy. And he cries out to God, Oh God, give me strength just one more time.

And he pushes down the columns and he pulls down the whole temple. Verse 34, the mention of fire there. Almost certainly referring to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And you know the stories have been around the church land a little while.

Three guys, they refuse to worship the gods of King Nebuchadnezzar. He threatens to burn them alive. And they say to the king, Oh Nebuchadnezzar, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace.

[3:14] But, oh king, even if he doesn't, even if he doesn't, we shall not serve your gods. Nebuchadnezzar is furious, throws them into the furnace, they're completely unharmed.

That's great stuff, right? That's fantastic stuff. The climax, the climax, the climax of these overcoming stories is verse 35. Woman received back their dead by resurrection.

Probably talking about Elijah and Elisha who both prayed for sons who had died and they came back to life. Amazing. God responds to faith and does these incredible things. And here's the thing. We love these stories, right? These are brilliant stories. We love them. We love them because they glorify God but also because we just love victory. We love winning. We just straight up love to win at stuff. Now this is really important. The passage, of course, has two lists.

[4 : 20] There's two lists of people in this passage. Two groups of people and they both had great faith. We've only talked about the first half. Pictures of faith that overcome the odds.

But there's another list, the second half. And these are pictures of faith when the problems weren't overcome. And the pivot between these two groups is verse 35.

You'll see the transition here. Verse 35. Women received back their dead by resurrection. That's awesome. Here's the transition. And there should have been a verse number here, I think. Women received back their dead by resurrection.

Awesome. And then it says, some were tortured. Others were mocked. They were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated.

So this is the other side of faith. Folks, sometimes faith looks like losing. Sometimes the faith God gives us is the strength to suffer, not the strength to conquer.

[5 : 26] One scholar I read this week said this, if your understanding of faith ends halfway through verse 35, you are doomed. If your understanding of faith ends halfway through verse 35, you're doomed.

If your faith says, if I just believe hard enough, you know, I will escape, I will get cured, I will overcome, life is going to ruin you.

Life's going to destroy your faith. That's because there's a world of difference between having faith in God and having faith in your agenda for God. There's a big difference between having faith in God and having faith in just your agenda for God.

So some people will say, I had faith for God for a husband or kids or a girlfriend or for the bully to leave me alone at school or the great career or the curing of an illness and God didn't come through for me.

God didn't come through for me. I had faith for that, God didn't come through. No, you had faith for your agenda for God, not in God himself. God doesn't give you faith so you can simply get what you want.

[6 : 34] See, often faith doesn't overcome illness. Sometimes faith doesn't overcome the big problems in your life. But God gives you faith to endure it. Folks, to be mature Christians, we need a faith that doesn't require us to win at everything.

Otherwise we're doomed. Let's go back to verse 35 with an example. Women receive back their dead by resurrection and then it pivots. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release so that they might rise again to a better life.

What's that talking about? Some women got back their dead and some were tortured. The word some here is referring to another woman. And the word tortured here in the Greek is a very specific type of torture.

And most scholars think it's referring to a specific incident. It's referring to the Maccabean martyrs. So around 200 BC, this foreign king swept through Israel called Antiochus IV, I think.

And he told everyone to deny God and worship him. And what he'd do is he'd like to bring up these prominent families. And he basically said, okay, I'm going to put all of these things in here you're not supposed to do, like defiled meat, you know, given to demons, whatever, you know, like stuff you're not supposed to do and say, do this stuff and you'll live.

[8 : 10] If you eat this defiled meat, you'll live. If you don't, I'll kill you. And it was brutal. It's a well-known story.

One mother, this is a mother who is in contrast to the other mother who gained back her family. There's one mother had seven sons brought out.

And they all refused to defile themselves. And it's quite brutal because the king, Nebuchadnezzar, would basically slowly torture them. So he'd love it. Terrible, right?

So the mother is seeing this happen. And with each son, as the son dies, she's saying to them, stay strong, endure. Stay strong, endure.

Do not deny God no matter what. So two Maccabees, which is one of the intertestamentals, mental books, has this final line before she is called before the king. And she says to the king, you dismiss us from this present life.

[9 : 13] But the king of the universe will raise us up as to a renewal of everlasting life. So she lived this life now with certainty about the next life, believing that whatever was taken from her now would be given back in the next.

And this is what verse 35 says. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release so that they might rise again to the better life. She was given a faith, not some miraculous intervention there, but faith to endure a horrible situation.

This is how one scholar put it this week in summarizing this chapter. The greatest challenge of the book of Hebrews is to cultivate such a deep and satisfying relationship with God that we rest in Him whether living or dying, comfortable or miserable.

The great challenge of Hebrews is to cultivate the unshakable confidence that God Himself is better than anything life can give us or anything death can take away from us.

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[10 : 38] I'm going to finish up here. Short summary. Short summary. Here we go. God works through faith. It pleases Him. And sometimes that faith is God uses that faith to do miracles and deliver people from really tough situations.

You might have stories like that in your life. I have stories like that. Some of us though actually never experience these stories because we don't even ask for these things.

We really get really concerned about how God will manage to pull off some amazing rescue and we lack an imagination for it and that's a pity because we should still pray for deliverance and miraculous intervention in our life.

So that's point one. God works through faith and that can result in a miraculous rescue. Some freedom from illness, some freedom from some terrible work situation, something like that.

Point two. Sometimes the problem does not go away and the faith that God gives us is a faith to sustain us through it.

[11 : 46] And the passage it doesn't differentiate between the two faiths. It doesn't say like, you know, if you have a lot of faith you get to category one. But if your faith is a bit average, nah, we'll just do you the enduring faith.

If it's huge you get the overcoming faith. If it's just a little bit of faith to get, no, it doesn't, how much faith we have doesn't determine the result whether you're in the first group or the second group.

That's just God's sovereignty.

The last thing I'll say is this and it's very interesting, right at the end of the passage, verse 38, it says this and it's so counterintuitive what it says. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated, of whom the world was not worthy.

What does that mean? Did you guys hear that at the start? They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, and mistreated, of whom the world was not worthy. What does this mean?

It means that suffering Christians are a gift to the world and this is the final thing I want to leave with you.

Suffering Christians are not, it's not the B-side witness, it's not the lame witness. It's not like the miraculous intervention, that's the A-game witness to the world and then there's the B-game, the B-side, which is a bit lame, the enduring, it's a bit lame.

[13 : 10] This one here says that suffering Christians are a gift to the world. When Christians suffer well, resilience in faith, the message to the world is this, there is something more important and more precious to me than my comfort and my desires.

faithful suffering says to the world that Jesus is more valuable than anything the world can give me and Jesus is more valuable than anything the world can take from me.

That's what faith does. It moves us away from our agenda for Jesus to Jesus himself. Amen. Amen.